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ABSTRACT

This briefing paper summarizes survey data collected from 42 state education agencies (SEAs) on the topic of personnel to support the education of children and youth with deafblindness. A variety of topics are covered including state and regional consultants, the use of paraeducators, state regulations and guidelines, and the involvement of deaf-blind projects in other state personnel initiatives. Results of the survey indicate that, despite the challenges educators face serving children and youth with deafblindness, there are personnel who provide specialized services and state regulatory guidance supporting this low incidence population. More than half of the states have state and/or regional consultants in the areas of vision, hearing, or deafblindness providing a variety of services, in addition to the state deafblindness projects. Also, in many states, deafblindness projects are involved in comprehensive system personnel development or state improvement grant activities in a number of ways. State regulations or guidelines related to employment, supervision, and in-service training of paraeducators who work one-on-one with students with disabilities exist in more than 20 states. Finally, interveners are working one-on-one with students who have deafblindness in at least 14 states. There are, however, many concerns about the training, support, and supervision of interveners. (CR)

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ED 454 637

Quick Turn Around

Project FORUM

QTA – A brief analysis of a critical issue in special education

Personnel to Support the Education of Children and Youth with Deafblindness

April 2001

By Joy Markowitz

Overview

This QTA is a summary of survey data collected from 42 state education agencies (SEAs) on the topic of personnel to support the education of children and youth with deafblindness. A variety of topics are covered including state and regional consultants, the use of paraeducators, state regulations and guidelines, and the involvement of deaf-blind projects in other state personnel initiatives.

Background

Providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with deafblindness presents challenges for practitioners and administrators around the country. Some of the greatest challenges are related to personnel, such as availability of state and regional support staff, and the use of paraeducators and interveners.[1] To examine some of these challenges, Project FORUM at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) conducted a survey as part of its Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

[1] The term "intervener" refers to a trained individual who works one-on-one with a child or youth who is deaf-blind in home, school, and community settings (Alsop, Blaha & Kloos, 2000).

Methodology

In collaboration with the National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults who are Deaf-Blind (NTAC), Project FORUM identified critical issues related to personnel support for students with deafblindness. These issues include the availability of educators knowledgeable in the areas of vision and hearing, as well as deafblindness. Also, the support of speech and language pathologists and paraeducators is often critical. Based on these issues, a survey was developed to collect data from SEAs on personnel that do support or could be supporting children and youth with deafblindness, and state regulations or guidance in these personnel areas.

The survey was sent to all states and non-state jurisdictions in late December 2000, with second and third mailings in early 2001. By March 2001, FORUM had received completed surveys from 41 states and one non-state jurisdiction.

Survey Results

Survey information is summarized in narrative format below. Survey responses by state can be found in Table 2 at the end of this document.

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State or Regional Consultants

Thirty-two of the 42 responding SEAs reported having a state vision consultant who provides services to local education agencies (LEAs). In 11 of those 32 states there are also regional consultants; one state has only consultants at the regional level. Schools for the Blind/Visually Impaired provide consultant services in five states, as does the Commission for the Blind in one state. Vision consultants may be full or part time. Four SEAs reported no state or regional vision consultants.

A similar situation exists regarding hearing consultants—32 states have a state consultant and seven of those also have regional consultants; two other states only have consultants at the regional level. Two states have consultant services from the School for the Deaf/Hearing Impaired, one from the School for the Deaf-Blind, one from the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and one from an institute of higher education. Hearing consultants may be full or part time. Three SEAs reported no state or regional hearing consultants.

In regard to state consultants in the area of deafblindness, 26 of the 42 responding reported such a consultant and nine also have regional consultants. In some SEAs, other entities provide consultant services in the area of deafblindness, including state deaf-blind projects based at various locations (n=7 SEAs),[2] university affiliated program (n=1), School for the Blind (n=1), and School for the Deaf-Blind (n=1). As is the case for the consultants discussed above, the role may be full or part time. Seven SEAs reported no state or regional consultants in the area of deafblindness.

The services provided by all these disability-specific consultants are similar, with most doing referral to other technical assistance (TA) providers, individual consultation, and workshops/training sessions. See Table 1 for a summary of services reported.

Table 1
Number of SEAs Providing Services
by Type of Consultant

Service	Vision	Hearing	DB*
Referral to other TA* providers	35	33	31
Individual consultation	34	35	31
Workshops/ Training	32	32	30
Workshops or Training specifically for paraeducators	19	15	23

*DB = Deafblindness; TA = Technical Assistance

Consultants in the areas of vision, hearing and deafblindness also provide other services. Services reported by two or more states are listed below.

Vision:

- Direct service to children/families (n=4)
- Resource center/library (n=3)
- Policy development (n=2)
- State task forces (n=2)
- Collaboration with state schools (n=2)

Hearing:

- Direct service to children/families (n=4)
- Resource center/library (n=2)
- Policy development (n=2)
- State task forces (n=2)

Deafblindness:

- Parent training/family support/family coordination (n=5)

[2] There are 48 state and multi-state federally funded projects for children and youth with deafblindness, but a number of them are not housed at the SEA. Survey respondents may not have been aware of the consultation provided by these projects.

- Resource center/library (n=3)
- Direct service to children families (n=3)
- Newsletter (n=2)
- Statewide census (n=2)
- IEP/IFSP team support (n=2)

Interveners

Fourteen of the 42 responding SEAs reported that interveners are working with children and youth with deafblindness in their states, although not all use the term "intervener." Seventeen respondents indicated there may be interveners, but only the LEAs would have this information; and 11 reported there are no interveners working in their states.

Seventeen respondents reported that their SEAs have been contacted regarding interveners. Inquiries have come from parents in 15 states, from service providers in 12 states, and from others in three states. The most common inquiry is of an informational nature (e.g., *What are interveners?*). The next most common question is where to access intervener training. In one state, where interveners are working with students with deafblindness, the respondent noted that there are "...many inquiries regarding the use of interveners, both from parents and service providers." Despite this documented interest in some parts of the country, no one has contacted the SEA regarding interveners in 25 states.

Respondents voiced a number of concerns and challenges related to the use of one-on-one paraeducators to provide services to children and youth with deafblindness. The most common concern/challenge (23 states) was training—the adequacy and appropriateness of preservice and inservice training. Supervision and support of paraeducators was noted as a concern/challenge by 13 respondents, and finding qualified individuals by 11. Additional concerns/challenges reported by at least three states are as follows:

- High staff turnover/retention (n=9)
- Funding one-on-one services (n=5)
- Social isolation of student (n=3)
- Clear definition of role (n=3)
- Quality provision of services (n=3)

State Regulations or Guidelines

State regulations or guidelines exist in many states related to employment, supervision, and in-service training of paraeduators, paraprofessionals or educational assistants who work one-on-one with students with disabilities. In specific, of the responding 42 SEAs, 21 have such guidance related to employment, 23 related to supervision, and 16 related to in-service training. Details regarding the nature of this guidance were not obtained.

Twenty-two states reported having current regulations or guidelines regarding student eligibility for speech and language services as a related service. This is a pertinent issue because communication is one of the major needs of most students with deafblindness; however, they are not likely to be classified as *speech or language impaired* so it is unclear how many qualify for speech and language services. The IDEA states that "The term 'related services' means...supportive services (including speech-language pathology...) as may be required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education..." [20 U.S.C. §1401(22)].

At least 12 states have regulatory language that indicates concomitant or secondary speech and language needs must be determined by established evaluation procedures and qualified professionals. Six

states specify the student must meet the criteria for *speech or language impairment* to receive this type of related service.

Regulations or guidelines in at least 11 states specify that the need for speech or language as a related service is to be made by the individualized education program (IEP) team. For example, one state's procedures note that "Many students, including those with developmental disabilities...exhibit limitations with expressive and/or receptive communication skills. Not all such students are...in need of therapeutic intervention from the speech-language pathologist...members of the IEP team... should consider whether or not enrolling a student for speech-language services will significant change his/her ability to communicate. "

Several states' regulations or guidelines indicate that a discrepancy between cognitive test scores (mental age) and communication test scores (language age) should not be the sole factor in determining the student's need for speech or language services. Other factors such as unmet speech and language needs, informal evaluation results, physical ability and educational history must be considered.

State Personnel Initiatives

All states have personnel initiatives as part of their State Improvement Grant (SIG)[3] or Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD).[4] Specifically related to deafblindness, there are 48 State and Multi-State Projects for Children and Young Adults who are Deaf-Blind (DB Projects). According to the 42 survey respondents, 30 DB Projects have been involved in CSPD or SIG activities in the past year. The most common type of involvement, reported by 12 states, is providing professional development through training sessions, presentations or workshops. In five states, DB Projects are involved with CSPD or SIG planning, and four contributed to writing of the SIG.

Other types of DB Project involvement described by at least two states include:

- SIG or CSPD funds partially support DB Project (n=3)
- Ongoing close collaboration with SIG/CSPD staff (n=3)
- Staff serve on SIG/CSPD advisory committee (n=2)
- Developed training module for SIG/CSPD (n=2)

Summary and Concluding Remarks

Despite the challenges educators face serving children and youth with deafblindness, there are personnel who provide specialized services and state regulatory guidance supporting this low incidence population. More than half of the states have state and/or regional consultants in the areas of vision, hearing or deafblindness providing a variety of services, in addition to the state DB Projects. Also, in many states, DB Projects are involved in CSPD or SIG activities in a number of ways.

State regulations or guidelines related to employment, supervision, and in-service

[3] Congress authorized the SIG program with the 1997 amendments to IDEA in order to support and encourage comprehensive strategies to improve educational results for students with disabilities. To date, a total of 27 states have received competitive SIGs in two funding cycles.

[4] "A statewide system...shall include, at minimum a comprehensive system of personnel development, including the training of paraprofessionals..." [20 U.S.C. § 1435 (a)(8)].

training of paraeduators who work one-on-one with students with disabilities exist in more than 20 states. Finally, interveners are working one-on-one with students who have deafblindness in at least 14 states. There are, however, many concerns about the training, support and supervision of interveners.

It is the intent that this survey data will help OSEP, NTAC, and others committed to maximizing the educational outcomes for children and youth with deafblindness make more informed decisions related to personnel, technical assistance, and related topics.

Reference

Alsop, L. Blaha. R., & Kloss, E. (2000). *The intervener in early intervention and educational settings for children and youth with deafblindness* (NTAC Briefing Paper). Sands Point, NY & Monmouth, OR: National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind.

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Table 2
Survey Responses by State

	Consultants[1]			Interveners Used in State	Contacts to SEA Regarding Interveners	State Regulations or Guidelines Related to...				DB Project Involved In SIG or CSPD
	Vision	Hearing	DB			Employment[3]	Supervision[3]	In-service[3]	S/L as a Related Service	
Alabama	S	S	S	Ask LEA	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Alaska	S	S	S	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Arizona	No	No	No	Ask LEA	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Arkansas	S, R	S, R	S	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
California	S	S	No	Ask LEA	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Colorado	S	S	S	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Connecticut	S, R	S	S, R	Ask LEA	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Florida	S	S	S	Ask LEA	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Georgia	S	S	No	Ask LEA	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Hawaii	S/D[2]	S/D[2]	S/D[2]	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Idaho	R	R	DB	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Illinois	S	S	DB	Don't know	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Indiana	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Iowa	S	S	S	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Kansas	S, R	S, R	S, R	Ask LEA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kentucky	S	S	DB	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Revising	Yes
Louisiana	S	S	S	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Maryland	S, R, DB	S	S, R, DB	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Massachusetts	O	O	DB	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Michigan	S	S	S	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Minnesota	S, R	S, R	S, R	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Mississippi	S	S	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Missouri	O	S	O	Ask LEA	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Montana	No	No	S	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Nebraska	S, R, O	S, R	S, R	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New Jersey	S, R	S	S	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
New Mexico	O	O	UAP	Ask LEA	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
New York	S	S	S, R	Ask LEA	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
North Carolina	S	S	S	Ask LEA	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
North Dakota	S, R	S	DB	Ask LEA	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Ohio	S, R	S, R	S, R	Ask LEA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Oregon	S, R	R	S, R	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Pennsylvania	S	S, R	S	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Rhode Island	S	S	S	Ask LEA	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
South Carolina	S	S	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
South Dakota	O	O	DB	Ask LEA	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Tennessee	S	S	S	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Revising	Yes
Utah	O	O	O	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
West Virginia	S	S	S	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Wisconsin	S, R	S, R	S, R	Ask LEA	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Wyoming	S	S	S	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Am Samoa	No	O	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

[1] Consultants: DB=Deafblind Project; O=Other; R=Region; S=State; UAP=University Affiliated Program.
[2] Hawaii is all one school district.
[3] Of paraeducators/paraprofessionals/educational assistants who work 1:1 with students with disabilities.